

4th May, 2021

Tel: 066-7184516

Thomas Gould, T.D.,
 Dáil Éireann,
 Dublin 2

PQ ref 19265/21

“To ask the Minister for Health the average waiting time for speech and language therapy in Cork North Lee services in March 2020 and in April 2021.”

Dear Deputy Gould,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response.

Children or adults, with or without a medical card or long term illness card, can be referred directly to the speech and language therapy service (SLT). There is no upper or lower age limit for eligibility to receive Primary Care SLT services. All referrals are prioritised for initial assessment and then, depending on the outcome of clinical assessments, children are waitlisted for the appropriate intervention. Children are seen for intervention, in line with their assessed need and where clinically indicated, within the available resources.

Waiting times for Speech and Language Therapy Service are presented in tables 1a and 1b below and are categorised as follows: awaiting initial assessment and awaiting (initial and further therapy). The data outlined includes waiting lists for Primary Care and HSE Funded Disability Agencies within Cork Kerry Community Healthcare (CKCH).

Table 1a

Cork Kerry Community Healthcare 2020 Waitlist Speech & Language Therapy March 2020 Figures					
	Total Waiting	No. waiting HSE Primary Care	No. waiting HSE Funded Disability Funded Voluntary Agencies	No waiting > 52 weeks HSE Primary Care	No waiting > 52 weeks HSE Funded Disability Funded Voluntary Agencies
Waiting For IA	501	501	0	0	0
Waiting Therapy	1669	993	676	27	309

Table 1b

Cork Kerry Community Healthcare April 2021 Waitlist Speech & Language Therapy March 2021 reporting period Figures					
	Total Waiting	No. waiting HSE Primary Care	No. waiting HSE Funded Disability Funded Voluntary Agencies	No waiting > 52 weeks HSE Primary Care	No waiting > 52 weeks HSE Funded Disability Funded Voluntary Agencies
Waiting For IA	575	575	0	0	0
Waiting Therapy	1939	900	1039	424	582

The national key performance indicator for initial assessment and initial therapy, for speech and language therapy is 12 months. Increases in children waiting over 12 months for therapy are significant consequent to the impact of Covid Pandemic March 2020 through to March 2021. Face to face appointments were paused at two intervals March 2020 - June 2020 and January 2021- March 2021 as obliged by National Public Health Guidance in lockdown post covid surges.


Initial assessment continues to meet the 12 month target although the number waiting has increased. CKCH is actively working towards a full resumption of all services and while speech and language therapy service has resumed it is at a reduced capacity due to public health guidelines and safety concerns for staff and patients.

The waiting times for assessment and therapy for children were also impacted by emergency redeployment measures of some Primary Care SLT staff to Covid testing centres and long term care settings. All staff have now returned from redeployment and are offering tele-therapy, where appropriate, and increasing their face to face interaction with clients in line with public health guidelines. Each session takes more time due to the need to sanitize and ventilate the room between each client, phoning clients to complete pre-session covid risk assessments and then ensuring that clients don't overlap in the waiting areas.

Cork Kerry Community Healthcare has made a submission for national funding to address the Covid related backlog in Primary Care and is actively working in the interim to address same within the funded resource

If I can be of any further assistance please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Majella Daly
Interim Head of Service - Primary Care,
Cork Kerry Community Healthcare